

# Things are about to get grizzly, please bear with me

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

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Following our recent edd-u-ckation in the wonders of eccentric British puppetry I expect you thought you'd seen it all. Think again! We've *bear*-ly scratched the surface. Sooty was working his magic for the BBC way back in 1955, long before Edd the Duck's *grand*mother was an ovum. Our favourite punk duck had some very big paw prints to fill.

First discovered in a novelty shop on Blackpool's north pier in 1948 and put to work entertaining Harry Corbett's own children, the puppeteer, magician and TV/stage presenter used soot to blacken the glove puppet's ears and nose... and a star was born. Back then there would have been no racist parallels drawn with the Black and White Minstrels. Now there would likely be a public inquiry!

The whispery one's debut performance in 1952 was on the BBC TV show, Talent Night, though it was clear from the start that Sooty was too extraordinary an artiste to be sidelined as a bit player in a variety pageant.

Accidental OBE Harry, the human glue that bound together the mute teddy bear and saxophone-reed-voiced squeaky dog double act hosted 'The Sooty Show' for the first two decades of its record-breaking run. As it evolved, dimwitted mutt, Sweep, joined the slapstick pantomime in 1957, and Soo, the prim and proper black and white bear with a human voice (belonging to Harry's wife in fact), lending her level-headed voice of reason to the panda-monium in 1964.



Contrary to popular belief, Sweep's seemingly gibberish, chirpy utterances were actually synced to a choreographed script, so if you were fluent in Sweeplish you could translate *without* Matthew's help. Silent Sooty, however, remains an enigma.

Harry's son Matthew (real name Peter) took the reigns in 1976 following his father's first debilitating heart attack, having purchased the rights for £35,000 to build on his legacy. In 1989 Sooty finished the job, killing Harry as he slept. He was aged 71 years young.



Matthew remained at the helm until 1998 by which time he felt it was the right moment for him too to pass the torch. By then the sitcom (of sorts) was being broadcast on rival channel, ITV, having been axed by the Beeb's network controller in 1967. In 1993, for contractual reasons, the show became known as 'Sooty & Co.' and continued airing on channel 3 where it was still hosted by Matthew. This ran until 1998 and explored the premise of the gang running a charity

shop based in Manchester, initially employing the Coronation Street set for filming, and even drafting in a couple of the soap's regular cast members for a special episode.

It's most fondly (and sniggeringly) remembered for the awkward-to-say-the-least 'Soo's Babies' episode in which Soo pretends to be pregnant for educational purposes. At one point Soo naively (?) jests that she feels like she has the whole of the Manchester football team inside her. That didn't go down too well with the Mary Whitehouse brigade either.



In 1997 Matthew sold the rights to his Sooty empire for £1.4m to the Irish merchant bank, Guinness Mahon, who also owned Thomas the Tank Engine at the time. They proceeded to turn it into an ill-conceived, one season animated spin-off cartoon known as 'Sooty's Amazing Adventures'. This time

the fluffy crew came equipped with lower limbs (commonly known as 'legs' I believe) and the setting was switched to a dilapidated theatre that harboured a magic stage with a built-in time travelling trapdoor. It wasn't a roaring success.

In 2001 the show was renamed simply 'Sooty', shunting his pals into the shadow of his star billing. It was essentially more of the same except set in a hotel run by the hand puppet trio and human interpreter. Although remaining stationed in the setting introduced by 'Sooty' Heights', the venue was relaunched as 'Hotel Sooty'. I'm surprised Soo and Sweep didn't go on strike! This ran until 2004 when Sooty et al took a protracted seven-year holiday from life in the TV limelight.



Determined to get back on track, in 2008 the license changed hands once again. To Richard Cadell, magician and owner of the Fun City amusement park based in Brean in the South West of England, who adopted the sole human role to host 'Sooty Heights' in 1999 following Matthew's retirement.

Returning to our screens in 2011, Sooty had moved to the Brean Leisure Park in Somerset where Matthew's successor, Richard, now works as the resident Mr Fix-It with the assistance of his furry entourage. The show continues to this day, Richard is a multi-millionaire with no intention to retire to a tropical island any time soon, and a spin-off movie is now in pre-production. You get the idea anyway; Sooty *was* and still *is* a big deal, even if those of you over the pond have never 'got busy' with his 'izzy wizzy'. It's surprising then that so few computer or console video games based on the golden caniform franchise have been produced over the years.





All three cross-platform titles were available for the Amiga, published by the remarkably-still-alive-and-kicking, Alternative Software, the most interesting of which (relatively speaking) is 'Sooty & Sweep'. Its cohorts are educational affairs, and who has the patience for that kind of hogwash? Certainly ain't no-one gonna learn me nuffink, innit.



Sooty - the shooty platformer - was developed in 1992 by PeakStar Software who were also responsible for (guilty of?) bestowing upon the Amiga world, 'Thomas the Tank Engine & Friends' (as well as its pinball spinoff).

Only two people were involved in its production, coder Nick Tuckett (alias Nick Byron whose most notable work is perhaps to be found in One Step Beyond and Tiny Troops), and musician, Ray Norrish, best known for his standout acoustic contribution to Blood Money. Did we ever find the solution to "the biggest unanswered question" by the way?

'Sooty & Sweep' is a budget £7.99 platformer romp aimed at the younger end of the market, obviously. Matthew has gone out and left the residents of Sooteries Cottage home alone to fend for themselves, and unsurprisingly they're making a bit of a hash of it. Sweep has carelessly left the door wide open for a battalion of creepy-crawlies to invade the homestead, and as if that wasn't enough of a dilemma alone, the messy

mutt has also strewn his half-chewed bones about the place causing a lethal trip hazard.



Playing as Sooty or Sweep (or *both* in two-player co-op mode) the onus is on you to gather up the bones and hand them to Soo, while corralling the garden bugs is entirely optional. Maybe off-camera Sooty sets about them with insect repellent in a manic, rabid frenzy - the massacre likely wouldn't be suitable viewing for such a young, innocent audience.

There are two difficulty modes from which to select; in easy mode lives are infinite, leaving you only to battle against the clock as you go about your bone-collecting mission.

Stunning the bug army with Sooty's magic wand or Sweep's water pistol long enough to grab a bone from the territory they patrol is your main means of attack, though a limited supply of custard pies can also be leveraged to even up the odds. Unfortunately, when they revive from their stupor they

bounce back twice as fierce, baying for your stuffing, so it's often best to simply evade them instead.



Soo sits in the corner of each level in a catatonic coma waiting for you to run into her, triggering the automatic exchange of each bone, only one per level in the Speccy version. You can't leave the screen even if you've unlocked the door with a key and there's an inviting, gaping hole standing before you - it's not a glitch despite your instincts to curse at the programmer.



On retrieving the last of Sweep's playthings you're rewarded with the message, "Congratulations you have found all the

bones" and a wave goodbye from Sooty and Sweep. Well, that's five and a half minutes of your life you'll never get back! I haven't done the calculations this time round, but at £7.99 a copy that must surely rival *The Sword and the Rose* for the dubious honour of 'most expensive game per second of gameplay'.

That said, the Sooty experience *is* infinitely enhanced by playing 'Spot Thomas the Tank Engine and the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle' (oh, and a 'Mud Men' (?) poster) lurking in the background. It's a shame the same can't be said of the bolted-on, entirely separate one-armed bandit snap game. What's that all about?

Cute graphics aside, all things considered, it's really not much cop, even for a six-year-old with attention deficit disorder. Also, it's got to be one of the buggiest games ever to grace the Amiga platform (right up there with the likes of *Apidya*... hoho, and indeed, ho). Sorry.



And anyway, what's Matthew doing leaving the kids to their own devices while he cavorts about in Lymm on his narrowboat? (he lives 7.9 miles up the road from me overlooking the Bridgewater canal). It's not a very good

example to be setting is it? One that he failed to learn from two years later!

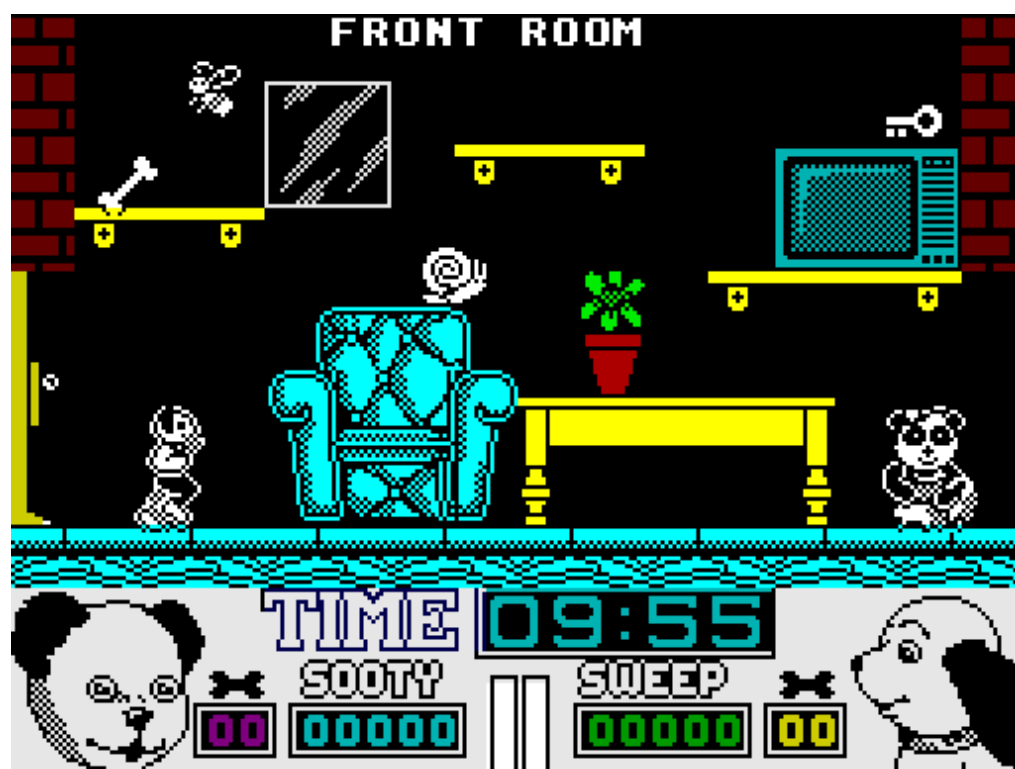


At the time of release the gaming press weren't especially impressed either. The path from TV to computer game celebrity never did run smoothly.

"It's fine for someone so young/stupid that they couldn't manage anything more complicated, but whether anyone in this category would be into computer games anyway is a bit questionable. In all fairness, unless you're knee-high to a mushroom or a die-hard Sooty And Sweep fan, then I'd leave well alone.

Monotonous, repetitive, childish, boring."

**47% - Your Sinclair issue 68 (August 1991)**



"Nice graphics, but otherwise a stupendously tedious waste of a license. Even our trusty Younger Player would more than likely rush out and overturn a police car."

**11% - Amiga Power (September 1992)**



"Sooty and Sweep might appeal to younger games players, but apart from its novelty value it's not really worth bothering with."

**26% - Amiga Action (September 1995)**



Well, all the critics wanted to incinerate Sooty and Sweep except for Amiga Format, who took quite a shine to it...

"The graphics have a curious sepia-tinted look to them, which contrasts with the cartoon feel of most children's games. But this doesn't detract from the game. There is an easy mode and a hard mode, but the game is eminently playable on either, especially if you're hard. The only criticism is that the sprites may be a bit small for a kids' game. Bold colours and massive objects are usually the order of the day. Still, not a bad game, and one with lots of detail on each screen."

### **80% - Amiga Format (October 1992)**



Clearly the Amiga Format critic was "driving a shopping trolley while under the influence of corn flakes". His opinion notwithstanding, I think it's now apparent why no more Sooty games were forthcoming. What's not so easy to fathom is why Matthew, Harry and Richard continued to play surrogate father to this unruly mob of furry reprobates when they were always so hell-bent on attacking them with a water pistol, hurled custard pie, hammer, saw or even a mousetrap. No wonder their real parents abandoned them at the first opportunity.

"Bye bye, everybody, bye bye."